Special Issue

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MASTI VENKATESA IYENGAR

Thoughts on Religion

THE ARYAN PATH

VOLUME L: SPECIAL ADVANCE ISSUE

Point out the 'Way'
~however dimly and lost among the host ~
as does the Evening Star
to those who tread their path in darkness.

Editor:
SOPHIA WADIA

THE ARYAN PATH (1979)

The year 1979 should have seen the publication of Volume L of THE ARYAN PATH *and been the Golden Jubilee Year of the journal. Unhappily, in the three years immediately preceding, the journal had been in special difficulties. Then in 1978 Theosophy Company (India), the charitable trust which publishes* THE ARYAN PATH, *faced circumstances beyond its control, such that staff-time indispensable to the publication of the journal had, nevertheless, to be transferred to critically urgent tasks in other departments of the trust's working. Only when 1979 was well begun did it prove possible to begin work on long-delayed issues of earlier volumes; and MSS. of two such were placed in printers' hands by the middle of 1979. And then extraordinary problems arose at the printers' which held up all work till the end of the year. In October 1980 the position is that work has been resumed on the arrears of publication up to the Volume for 1978 but that many months must elapse before these are made up and we can turn to Volume L, for 1979.*

In this predicament it was our good fortune to receive from our old and esteemed friend and contributor, Shri Masti Venkatesa Iyengar, a paper entitled "Thoughts on Religion."

This is being published as a Special Issue in Advance of the delayed publication of Volume L (1979). Plans have been made to complete the publication of Volume L on the present basis of six issues a year. Publishers' decisions as to publication beyond Volume L will be announced later.

Volume L (1979) will consist of six bi-monthly issues.

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THE ARYAN PATH

Point out the "Way" — however dimly, and lost among the host — as does the evening star to those who tread their path in darkness.

— *The Voice of the Silence*

VOL. L : SPECIAL ADVANCE ISSUE : 1979

MASTI VENKATESA IYENGAR

Thoughts on Religion

[Shri Iyengar, among the most distinguished and senior of Indian writers by virtue of his writings in Kannada and English, is also President of The P. E. N. All-India Centre. In this paper he sums up his mellow yet independent reflections on Religion, which are detached and critical yet imbued with the essentials of Indian tradition. He would himself expect that readers will differ in their responses to one particular point or another; but all must feel prompted to dwell upon the fundamental issues raised and the weaknesses of existing religious ways.—ED.]

Thoughts

THOUGHT is man's privilege; it is therefore a responsibility.

Hence, also, it is a duty and a joy. By thought man rises; realizes; becomes more than himself; becomes the total; and that is God.

Thought leads to ideas; to hold on to them, and look all round them, and shape them is the way to growth and to realization. We need to shape all ideas: ideas about what we are; what life is; what God is; what righteousness; what good; what bliss; what heaven and hell are, and the hundred things concerning which our intelligence has wrestled for ages.

It is the *Chit* in our nature that thinks. Naturally this faculty turns its attention first on man's self and then on the world in which he lives.

From the first activity comes philosophy and from the second science. Science and philosophy do not exclude each other. Philosophy, in thinking of man's self, thinks also of the reaction of the world in which he lives on that self. Science studies the human person as it studies other things in nature. Each branch of knowledge influences and is influenced by the other branch of knowledge.

Thinking of one's self is natural to men, but the faculty is not of the same intensity in all. As in any other respect, men differ greatly from one another in this also. Those whose faculty is keen, and who exercise it and arrive at the truth about our selves, we call philosophers.

What is the truth about our selves? This can be stated in terms of a number of questions. Who am I? Where have I come from? Where do I go? Why am I here?

Just as there is a difference between person and person in the intensity of the faculty, there is a difference in the quality and the tone. Man's thought runs therefore in many channels. So the answers given by different types of mind vary. So we have many philosophers in what nevertheless is one philosophy.

MY *Self*

The idea we have to shape first is the idea of the self. Who, what am I?

The first thing to say in answer is : the thing that dwells in this body, not the body itself. For the day will come when the body remains without that thing. That day the body ceases to be I. Today I am pointing to the body as I. That day I shall not be in it to say so: and without me the body is not able to say, "I."

I, the wise ones of the past said, is One. It pervades the Universe. It is one in all living things.

There are religions that say that only man has a soul. It is obvious that that cannot be the case. Man is not different from other forms of life in this respect. He is more developed. He can say, "I." They cannot. But inability to say "I" does not mean absence of the I. A dumb person cannot say "I"; but he is a soul. Soul, Spirit; all things that live are Spirit.

"I," then, is a drop of the Spirit that is present in the Universe. It is a separate drop. It is a separated drop. But for separation, it would not say "I" of itself. Separation from the total is the essential feature of individual existence. A child in the womb has to come out before it can be an individual. A drop of water has to come out of the ocean to be a drop at all. This separated I is my self.

It has certain characteristics. It exists; thinks; feels.

Millions of millions of "I's" have been and have disappeared. Millions and millions of "I's" are now and will disappear. Millions and millions again will appear in time to come, and disappear when their time comes. Where do they come from and where do they disappear into? There must be a source from which they can come in this unending series. Their disappearance can be only into the total.

The iceberg is separated from the ocean. It is the same substance as the ocean: its form is different. When it dissolves, it ceases to be. It will merge in the ocean.

The air in a bubble of water on the pond is separated from the atmosphere by a cover. It is a unit by itself. The cover bursts. The individual has ceased to be, and is part of the total.

The electric lights in our homes are electricity from the powerhouse passing through wire or gas. When the lights are on, the power is visible as light. When they are off, it does not cease to be; it is part of the general store of power.

Each of us is a minute part of the total Spirit in the Universe, appearing separate because we are each in a body. We merge into the total when we cease to dwell in the body.

The ceasing to dwell in the body has been called death. Death means ceasing to be. In this case, ceasing to be in the body; not from "absolute" being. The death is of the body, not of that which dwells in it. As the *Gita* says, "*Avinashi tu tat viddhi*" — "Know it as not perishable."

"I" is, therefore, an immortal unit separated from the total, and living a separated life for the time given to it in the body in which it dwells.

Is the total a Spirit? It should be. It should be Spirit or something more, not less.

Our Spirits have come from the total. They could not come from something less than themselves. You do not take a hundred rupees from a purse that contains only ninety. The earth came from the Sun. It has helium. Is helium present in the Sun? It must be. Cannot all the helium in the Sun have been drained off when the earth was formed? Not impossible; but not likely. So far as our Spirit is concerned we may be sure all the Spirit in the Universe has not come away. More and more of us are being born, and all of us are complete persons as ever.

MY *Life*

This life consists of being, thinking, and feeling : *Sat*, *Chit*, and *Ananda*.

We, living things, are millions of millions of particles of *Sat*, *Chit*, *Ananda*, separated from the total, and floating in it for the time given to us.

The total is *Sat*, *Chit*, *Ananda*. It is being, thought, and bliss. Necessarily it has existed always.

Indeed always is time. Time itself is something *in* the total, not outside.

That is : the total has made Time.

Similarly it has made Space.

We are drops of Spirit come out of the Spirit that is the total.

The water on the earth is proof that there is an ocean. We Spirits are proof that there is an ocean of Spirit.

We are Spirit separated from a total. That total, is it *all* Spirit?

It must be. It is *Sat*, *Chit*, *Ananda*; and *Chit* and *Ananda* must be Spirit.

Just as it separates drops and makes you and me, it separates drops and makes all the things we see in creation. Like me, each particle in creation is *Sat*, *Chit*, and *Ananda*.

So not only the living things but the lifeless things also are *Sat*, *Chit*, and *Ananda*.

All these are visible in living things. Only *Sat* is visible in the lifeless things; but that does not mean that *Chit* and *Ananda* are not present in them. They are there but not manifest. Why should this be so? Because *Sat*, *Chit*, *Ananda* are not three separate or separable principles. The total is one. It is all these three in one. It becomes all; each particle in what it becomes is all that the total is. That is, it is *Sat-chit-ananda*. In us all three are manifest. In non-living things, *Sat* is manifest, and *Chit*, *Ananda* are latent.

Each particle is an epitome of the total. The total is present in it in full. St. Augustine addressed God: "O Thou, who art present in full, in every particle of Thy creation." Purandaradasa said of God: "He is present in full in each atom and particle, in grass and stick." This is the meaning of Prahlada's yes to his father's question if his God was present in a pillar and of the father's kicking the pillar and Narasimha appearing within the pillar.

The question "What am I?" then leads man to the conclusion that everything in creation is the abode of the Supreme Being.

"I" thus is merely a notion of what takes itself as dwelling in the body. But that body is from the Supreme Being; so is the breath in it; so is the intellect in it; the mind; so are the faculties; so our strength, courage, steadfastness, and power. The Supreme Being has become all this. He is all this: "*Indriyani mano buddhih,*" etc. are all "*Vasudevatmaka*" (ensouled by Vasudeva), says the text.

Pondering over this I realized one day that the non-living things in creation are as alive as I and that their power to think and feel is only frozen. There is no *Sat* but it is also *Chit* and *Ananda*. "Is that so?" I said, "How wonderful!"

That day a Swamiji of the Sri Ramakrishna Order working in Brazil had come to the Mutt in our neighbourhood. I went to see him. We talked of his experience in Brazil. All of a sudden, without anything in the talk to suggest the question to him, he said: All *Sat* has *Chit* and *Ananda* implicit in it.

This kind of answer to a question in my heart, given without any question on my side, has come to me many times in life, and made me realize that the *Chit* in all of us is one. There is only one Mind in the Universe as there is only one Being, and only one Feeling.

When, at the end of our talk, I got up to take leave and approached the Swamiji to touch his feet, he pulled me to himself and embraced me. I said, "I wished to touch your feet and do *pranam*." He said: "That is right from your side and you may do it. But this is right from mine, and so I am doing this." When he released me from the embrace I bent down and touched his feet in obeisance and received his blessing.

This repeated experience of other minds responding to mine without open application shows that, though separate externally, our minds are internally one.

As all mind is *Chit*, so all being is *Sat*. If I could only realize it in the same way, I would find that my Spirit and my brother man's Spirit, the Spirit indeed in all things, is one. But this realization is harder than that of the identity of the mind.

As the poet said, each individual is a bit of land sticking out of the sea as an island. Between them wide and deep is the estranging sea. At bottom we are all one. It is a variation of the figure to say that each individual is an iceberg in the ocean of Spirit: each iceberg is different from other icebergs, but in substance the same. All living things are members one of another, as the Apostle said. *One* lives, we all live in *It*.

We all live and move and have our being in the One.

My tongue feels a taste. Who is it that feels it, my tongue or I? So for the other senses : so indeed for all the faculties. I am to the One as my tongue is to me — with this difference: my tongue or eye has not been taught to say, "I taste, I see." If they had been, they would have the feeling of a separate personal experience such as I have.

Kanakadasa said: the hearing my ear does is Your hearing, the sight my eye sees is Your seeing. All experience is God's. Man has no independent experience. "*Bhunkte vishvabhuk avyayah.*" The Supreme One who knows no diminution, He is the experience, and He experiences.

God

Earnest thought about one's self thus brings men to think of God; indeed to speak of God.

There is frequent reference to the total, to God, to the Supreme Being, to the One, in the section on the individual self. This is inevitable. The individual self and the Supreme Self are two faces of the same entity. God is; I am. If God is not, I am not. Rightly understood, only God is; I either am not or, if I am, am in Him.

He is; All is. *Sarvam khalu idam Brahma.* "Indeed all this is Brahman." The Great One. The Supreme Being.

When this is not realized, we tend to ask questions about God and even to deny Him.

What then is this Supreme Being like?

First of all He is not merely a human on a large scale. Much thought about God goes wrong because of our feeling that God must be like us. The Bible says God made man in His image. Christianity has gone on with this idea of a God who is male, human, powerful, merciful, etc. etc. Other religions which posit a God take the same course: e. g. Islam and Zoroastrianism. Even in Hinduism, which conceives God as different from man, the main idea of the Supreme Being is that He is male. There is a Universal Mother. But she is subject to the Supreme. This is due to the anthropomorphic bias of our thinking. Our thought is limited. It cannot, as a rule, pass beyond the human level.

The proper attitude to the question is to admit that man cannot know all about God or strictly know what He is. The Supreme is *Anirvachaniya* — ineffable. *Yato vacho nivartante aprapya manasa saha.*

We are particles in the total and cannot know what the total is like. The vulgar fraction, I said once, cannot know what the integer feels like. We are made after God's image but cannot know what He is like. The figures to the right of the decimal point look like the figures to the left, but their value is different. To look like is not to be like.

While we cannot know in full what God is, we can to some extent conceive His nature.

God is at least as good and beautiful and true as the highest in these directions which we can think of. We could not have thought of so much

beauty and goodness and truth, if the source of it all were not something more. There could not have been so much of these if there were not a source from which they could come.

Think of the perfection of lives like those of Rama, Krishna, Christ, Buddha, Mohammed, and other great teachers and their great followers in all the great faiths the world over. What heights these great ones reached in spiritual ascent! What greater heights may there not be? These heights that have been reached — how great they are! These great men cease to be men and become God.

The difference in degree is so great, they become a different species. The human who is ape or tiger and the human who is God: both have the same human form but the spirits are utterly different.

Yet they are the same because it is open to the lower type to struggle and rise to the higher. Man can grow Godward.

He may do this without knowing he is doing so: even without acknowledging God. The desire to grow into a better man is all that is required to turn man in due course into God. This desire to grow better, this dream of a better, is the great good fortune of the human species.

The source Spirit is the total, which is God. All the good in the world is an incarnation of the good in the total. As the *Gita* teaches: the grand, the great, the noble, is all of it born from a part of the grand, the great, and the noble in the Supreme.

This is what Sanatana Dharma has called *Avatara*, the Descent into the world.

As God is the highest good which man can think of, no-one can be Godless. The staunchest materialist is actuated by an idea of the good, the happiness of the race, a dream of the good State. That dream is the embodiment of God as reflected in him.

Is God not a person? It is a person for convenience of conception and reference: not if you do not need it but can act upon it even without thinking of it as a person. The universal, highest, good, the dream of which drives the best minds to work for a better life for the race, is God.

Savage man wondered at the grandeur of the world in which he was placed. He enjoyed its beauty. He rejoiced in the good things of life. The total of such experience shaped into God later.

More civilized, man placed God in a great place on a great throne, in the highest style which he could conceive. This was Vishnu, Shiva, Jehovah, Jove, Allah, in Vaikuntha, Kailasa, Heaven, or similar abode of highest bliss.

God had an entourage, and lived in state. He was king of kings.

He was law, power, justice, munificence, mercy, forgiveness, graciousness, love, universal father, universal mother, universal benefactor, the friend in distress, the uplifter of the lowly, protector of the helpless.

He came down to the earth to protect the weak, and put down the evil-minded; he sent his Son to earth to help mankind; he sent his Messenger with the same idea.

This notion grew stale later. The evil in the world made men doubt if there was a ruler seeing to it that justice prevailed and the lowly and the suffering found relief and help. Some men denied the existence of God.

They denied the existence of God so conceive , not God Himself.

The idea had failed, not God. The institution meant to secure the happiness of the race had failed. Men had to get a new idea; and new institutions.

Marxism is one such new idea, and the basis of new institutions.

Throwing out the old idea of God, however, Marxism had brought in a new idea. Lenin took the place of a Saviour in Russia. He helped the lowly, he stood by the distressed, he succoured the helpless. He put down the unrighteous rulers, and drove them away from the seats of power, and installed in their places righteous men who loved their fellow men. He fulfilled some of the functions attributed to deity in the past Lenin is God to many Marxists. Men go to his tomb and place wreaths on his grave in adoration and thankfulness.

Men cannot do without God. This is not a matter for shame or regret. It merely means that men must have ideals to live at all. Man must think of the greater good, the highest good, and work to attain it.

In the language used in Sanatana Dharma, Lenin is the latest *Avatara*, i.e. an incarnation of God. He took birth to work for the greatest good of mankind.

But Lenin denied God? Yes; he denied God as understood by the people whose ideas he repudiated. In doing so he reaffirmed God as he understood Him.

As Emerson made Brahma say, "When you wish to fly from me I am the wings with which you fly."

God is the great good which is the heart's desire of the race of man as felt in the innermost spirit of the best and noblest persons whom it has produced and may yet produce. Every denial of the past by the great men of the race is a denial of what was wrong in the past, and implicitly an affirmation of something better.

So man must grow from good to better; from height to greater height; from the drab things he knows as life to the ideals whose vision makes him dizzy with delight.

He must grow: there is no escape. That is how the half-gods go, so that the gods may arrive.

The Process of Growth

Man has to grow. Indeed, all life is growth.

Life, here, is life in the widest sense. The *Mahabharata* says that the creeper which seeks a direction to grow in and clings to some support does so because it has a life and a desire. So all life is one. It is one family.

It has a tendency to grow, to ripen, to decay and end. The end we know as death.

But death is death of the body; the tenement has become useless, and the tenant leaves it; but the tenant does not die. It has grown through life. It

probably will grow after leaving this tenement. Probably, because there is a strong desire to grow in the tenant when it leaves the tenement. The Spirit, as has been said, says : "*Tamaso ma jyotirgamaya, mrityor ma amritam gamaya, asato ma sat gamaya,*" i.e. "Lead me from darkness to Light, from death to the Deathless, from the unreal to the Real."

To live separated from the total is truly death, darkness, and non-existence. In life we are in death, and, dying, become immortal.

But is the Spirit, merely because it leaves the tenement, fit to become one with the total?

Or, merely because it is still in the body, is it incapable of feeling in full its identity with the whole?

No: feeling separated or identical is an experience, and this may not come even after death; it may come even before death.

The individual self should realize it is nothing in the presence of the Highest. It then becomes one with the Highest.

The ego should disappear. The feeling of I, I, I, is what makes me feel different from the total. When this feeling is removed, the feeling of difference goes. The whole of life is one. Our ego makes it a fraction for us. The ego is the denominator. The larger the denominator, the smaller the value of the fraction; the smaller the denominator, the greater the value. Reduce the ego to nothing: infinity is yours.

Spiritual growth consists in this reduction of the ego.

Selflessness is the core of all that is good in life: all truth, goodness, and beauty is based on selflessness. A man is truest to himself when he forgets himself, and helps another; his life then reaches its highest and best; it is then most beautiful. That is why men always admire self-sacrifice in a good cause, renunciation even when there is no need.

To deny the self is to achieve a height. He that loses his soul shall gain it. Ceasing to be his smaller self, he becomes the greater Self.

While still in high school, something I heard from Swami Abhedananda, from Mrs. Annie Besant, from Shri S. K. Nair, led me to write, "Knowing that the self is naught, is knowing that the Self is all."

The smaller self and the bigger Self. To lose the smaller self is to gain the bigger Self. We lose nothing: the loss is illusory. The gain is everything. It is palpable gain. We give up our ball of silver, and get an equal weight in gold. The essence of growth is to learn to give up the things of smaller value and gain those of higher value. Life is our opportunity for developing the true sense of growth.

But before you can give up, you must own. Live a full life and know the joy of it, and then give it up.

What is the purpose of all this? Man cannot know for certain. He can only infer, imagine, guess. Our knowledge in this respect is empirical.

We are made in a certain way. We have faculties, impulses, desires, hopes, fears, unknown longings, and unknown dreads. To reconcile them and make the utmost we can of life is the correct thing to do.

We have a body. It grows. To grow as well as we can, in health and

strength, and to use all of our faculties as safely and profitably as we can, is our object with the body.

We have a mind. To see and hear all we can in life, and think clearly and boldly, to speak clearly and beautifully, to use our faculties competently and purposefully, and to do all the good we can, is the way to make full use of our mind.

Each person's life should be as beautiful and useful as possible, both for his own sake and for the sake of the society in which he lives.

This is the conscious and unconscious object which has made men act through the ages. This is what has brought the race from the savage state to the state of civilization in which it is today.

Distrust of civilization is a feature of very advanced thought in civilized societies today. This is a natural tendency in the human mind. We have to remember this and correct the tendency.

Questioning if a course is right (and not wrong), on the other hand, is necessary to make sure we are on the right track.

The first attack on civilization came from the disbelievers in an after-life and in what we have known as God. The attack was justified by the absurd lengths to which belief in both respects had led men. But the attack itself went to absurd lengths in its turn.

The school which led the attack in our country was the Charvaka school, supposed to have been founded by Brihaspati, the priest of the gods. The attribution is perha s erroneous. The Brihaspati who started this argument must have been another teacher, a human one.

Charvaka means "person of pleasant speech." The teaching, in substance, was : "Believe in what you are sure of; do not believe in fancies; make life happy; do not make for avoidable trouble in the name of righteousness."

Sound, so far as one can see. But it could be turned to very evil counsel. An example of this was the argument of Jabali, as stated in the *Ramayana*, advising Rama not to go to the forest to fulfil his father's promise. Charvaka teaching was caricatured later in some verses, which were all that was left to later generations to indicate the teaching. The teaching of Jabali in the *Ramayana* is the core of the Charvaka teaching. Its object, as of all teachings, is to make life most fruitful.

All religion is an attempt to regulate life so as to make it most fruitful.

Man needs a religion as he needs God. He may not know it as religion; as he sometimes does not know that he is believing in God. The essential points of religion are a conception of what life means, what its goal is, and how that goal is to be reached: a metaphysic, an ethic, and a fu filment. All these are present in the most secular creed we can think of: the creed is secular because it denies religion, but is itself a religion without knowing it.

Lenin denied God but became a saviour. Communism, Secularism, Humanism, Agnosticism, Atheism, any other "ism" that seeks to make life the most fruitful thing it can be, is a religion. Man's happiness is the object. Obscure metaphysics are not required for securing this object. A heaven is not necessary either. Make the most you can of life here.

Of course. Make the most. But what is that most?

That is again metaphysics. No serious discussion of the purpose of life can avoid being metaphysical.

And you find when you go far enough in the argument that the thing we desire most is not the happiness of the individual but of the total.

Lenin went through a lot of trouble to secure happiness for his fellow men.

It is a question of values. What is worth while? My happiness or yours? Our happiness, or the happiness of the group of which we are part? Take the most selfish man: you find he has those for whom he will make sacrifices. Take the most selfish group: it is prepared to make sacrifices for what it calls the country. The doctrine was stated in the *Mahabharata* in the text :

"*Tyajet ekam kulasyarthe, gramasyarthe tyajet kulam, gramam janapadasyarthe, Atmarthe prithivim tyajet*". (A single person should be given up for the sake of a family; for the sake of a village a family should be given up; for a nation, a village; and for the sake of the Atman, the whole earth should be given up).

Religion in its origin satisfies a need of the human spirit. The expressions of it which offend the odern conscience are not essential to religion. Untouchability can be no part of a religion which says "*Sarvam khalvidam Brahma.*" An exclusive right to salvation cannot be part of the teaching of the meekest of men that Jesus was. Unbridled violence was no part of the teaching of Hazrat Mohammed, whose greeting to a fellow man was "Peace unto you."

Religions have grown, and in growing have become better in some details and worse in others. The basis of the religious feeling is the sense of wonder, awe, delight, and love that man feels in the presence of the universe. What magnitude! What power! What beauty! What regularity! What tenderness! What strictness, yet what mercy!

The globes of light, the spots; the width and depth of space in which they stand and move; the sun, the winds, the light, the heat, the earth, the water, the fire. How great all is compared to the human creature; yet how they minister to his needs and look after him!

What power, what wisdom, what purity, what holiness, what beauty! So our mind turns round and round the qualities seen in nature.

Man feels a presence in the neighbourhood of the great things in creation : the sea, the mountain, the forests, the huge boulders, the grand trees, and the creepers and the flowers they bear : and the grass; and the countless little things that are alive like himself, and creep, run, and fly, and these have minds like himself!

And feelings.

Creation is endless and is magnificent.

Behind it is a Person or something more than a person.

This is the basis of religion in its million forms starting with the crudest ideas of primitive man and growing in various climes and through the ages to the most sophisticated faiths and their negations that we know today.

Of the basis the substance is:

This great creation is ruled by Law. We obey it and are happy : disobey and suffer.

Disobey and suffer, and repent and crave for forgiveness, and receive mercy and are saved.

Or, are not saved; for each act has a consequence, and that consequence persists in however tenuous a form for always.

So beware lest you fail the Law.

So comes the feeling for the righteous life and the conviction that fulfilment is in righteousness only and in nothing else.

Hence the joy of renunciation, greater than that of possession; the greater joy of giving than of receiving; of asceticism than of enjoyment; of being a man without man's weaknesses, with only his strength *in excelsis*: of in fact being divine.

All religions are attempts to lead man from the primitive wonder to this final phase of surpassing humanity and becoming divine.

All religion begins thus with the poetry of beauty and wonder and ends with the poetry of sublimity.

Slowly the feeling must have grown that we are in the presence of a great Being : that it has personal relations with us; that it is benign, but also exacts obedience to its Law.

Thus has grown a sense of right and wrong, good and evil, beauty and ugliness, and real joy and happiness and the contrary.

Thus also has grown ceremony and ritual to keep in touch with the Supreme, to propitiate it; to win the approval and avoid the disapproval of the Supreme.

The more sensitive souls have felt the supreme presence in their own lives. Others have taken that word as true and acted as if they themselves knew that presence for a fact.

A development of this is the worship in which man makes God in his own image and fancies Him talking and acting like a human.

The worship in temple and home in Hinduism built round this idea helps in bringing the thought of God, the Supreme Being who is father and protector, nearer to the heart.

Continuous practice of worship in this manner in the home has been found to bring on the feeling of the presence of the Supreme in the home all the moments of life. God, in ideal cases, becomes in truth the head of the household and the members feel like children living and moving in the presence of the father.

As religious practice became wider, a priest class came into being. As it gave prestige and a comfortable position to be a priest, men were encouraged to practise the ceremonial because it was the practice previously. This led to deterioration in religion.

This is seen in all religions.

In the beginning all believed in miracles. Later generations invented miracles. Those who make a trade of religion now pretend they are performing miracles and attract people. There may be a saint now and then who can work a miracle. But many who are not such saints claim the power, and

bring the true ones also into disrepute.

Religions thus pass through an age of innocence, an age of sophistication, and an age of decadence.

In the first stage come stories like those of Moses, of the birth of Ramachandra and his brothers, and the births of Buddha, of Christ.

The age of sophistication brings in elaborate ritual, deep and genuine devotion, and religious literature to support ceremonial and devotion.

The decadent stage sees all this taken too far. Come Pope and monk, *swami* and *sadhu*, and such others, honoured because they wear a cloak, or occupy a seat of authority; and quarrels between religion and religion, and between sects of the same religion, and the abomination of desolation in religion which leads men to feel tired of the very name of religion and deny it altogether any right to touch men's lives.

The berry grows and ripens into a fruit, ripens further and rots.

The river starts with molten snow in Gangotri, and becomes the Ganges of Varanasi into which has flowed all the dirty water of all the country all the way down, and ends in Gangasagar full of the dirtiest water imaginable.

Shaiva-Vaishnava acrimony; Advaita - Vishishtadvaita - Dvaita wrangles; Tengale-Vadagale hatred are the depth in Sanatana Dharma, known to the world as Hinduism. Roman Catholicism and Protestantism and the hundred sects in Christianity each claiming superiority over the others; Sunni and Shia hatred, and the recent denial by the Sunnis of the Baha'is as no Mohammedans at all; and the denial of Christ two thousand years ago and the anathematization of a sweet, noble, and gracious thinker like Spinoza in Judaism are the dirt-laden end of religions which in their beginning were all pure and beautiful.

Religious Literature

There was a stage in the development of the race in which poetry, religion, and philosophy were one. The earliest singer was also a man of God and the thinker for the populace. The Vedic rishis were poets and also servants of God. Caedmon in English literature is a person of this type. All the great teachers were also poetic in their experience and expression. Socrates and Plato were poets. So were Buddha and Zarathushtra. Christ was a poet: "See the lilies of the field..." was the cry of a man whose inmost self was poetic. The parables and stories in all religions were the work of poetic spirits.

Literature in the early stages served religion and helped it to grow and touch the lives of the populace.

There was however a limit to the extent to which literature could go in this service. Beyond that stage it did harm to true religion. Some harm also came from the fact that the ways of literature were not understood by all, and what was said in figurative words was taken as history.

In Hinduism the stories of Narasimha and Vamana are instances of parables too often taken for history.

A spark of genuine faith can face a huge pile of questions and when the proper moment comes terrible misfortune breaks the questions and leaves

faith triumphant.

A spark of the Self admitted into life grows and grows until the self is overpowered, and accepts it and submits to it.

But as these tales are now taught, a child is supposed to have been thrown down from a house-top, trodden upon by elephants, and so on, and not died.

Vamana took a promise of land that might be covered in three steps, when he was of small size, and grew so huge that he covered the earth and the sky in two steps and there was no space for the third step. Cheat, says the honest hearer of today. Yes, cheat, if the story is understood literally. But that is not the meaning the story had at first.

Similar harm was done by lovers of religion adopting great poetry as work of religious import and adding impossible elements to it to demonstrate the power and the glory of God as conceived by them.

The supremely human Rama of the "*Ayodhya Kanda*" of the *Ramayana* becomes, in the additions made to the *Ramayana* by later poets, the hero of a fable like the story of Jack and the beanstalk. Monkeys speak; one of them jumps across a thousand miles of sea; a giant has ten heads; and the king of the gods sends his car to help Rama in a battle.

This was service neither to religion nor to poetry.

The supremely human Krishna of the *Bharata* is similarly transformed to a worker of miracles and a trickster who adopted any devious means in order to help his friends.

Even greater harm was done by persons who thought that their idea of God was the best and who cried down other ideas. Their idea was one god, and the other ideas were other gods. So we have gods many, and faiths many, each at the pleasure of their followers ready to war with all others to establish the superiority of a particular god.

The competition between Vishnu and Shiva is typical of the attitude partisans can take. The *Bharata* said "*Rudro Narayanaschaiva tatwamekam dvidhakritam*" (Rudra and Narayana are one principle appearing in two ways). But the truth it declared was not to the taste of the partisans.

At one stage the Vaishnavas made out that Vishnu was greater than Shiva by the fable found in the *Ramayana* that the gods wished to know which was greater, and Brahma made them fight with bows, and Vishnu was found superior. "*Adhikam menire Vishnum*" is the text in the *Ramayana*. The bow used by Shiva was damaged, and this was the bow that Rama had to bend in Mithila to win Sita. He bent it and it broke.

The Shaiva was not to be beaten. He fabled that Brahma and Vishnu once attempted to measure the altitude of the Shiva-*linga* and one went up to see where the upper end was and the other to see where the lower end, and both failed to reach the ends and returned baffled. So Shiva was greatest!

Many are the stories purporting to show some god's superiority. The idea of God, of Shiva and Vishnu in some of these stories, is so mean that one sickens at the thought of the depth to which the human mind can fall even when thinking of God.

Gods have physical bodies in these stories and their behaviour is human

and subhuman. No detail is too intimate and no filth too repulsive for record.

And you get it in a prayer many of our people repeat every day, in the benedictory verse beginning a play, in the episode in the *Ramayana* relating to the birth of Skanda, and in the story of Shiva and Mohini in the *Bhagavata*.

My friend V. Lingappaiya once asked me if the *Ramayana* said that after Rama's victory over Ravana Shiva appeared before Rama and blamed him for having killed a devotee of his and wanted to fight him and punish him; and that the other gods intervened and stopped the quarrel. A *Swami* of the Madhwa school had told this story to an audience in Mysore in which Lingappaiya was present. I said there was no suggestion of it in the *Ramayana*. He was surprised. The *Swami* would seem to have been making up a fable of his own to prove that Vishnu could kill a devotee of Shiva and that Shiva was powerless to save him.

A verse in the *Ramayana*, as we have it now, says that not the four-faced Brahma nor the three-eyed Shiva nor the Ruler of the Gods Indra could save him whom Rama decided to slay. The verse is, however, quite clearly an interpolation: the work of someone like the Swamiji, ready to say anything necessary to prove that Vishnu was superior to Shiva and Brahma and Indra.

One God

The best minds in Hinduism have striven hard to remove this wrong notion by naming God Harihara, Shivarama, Shankaranarayana; but the sectaries have defied all such attempts and the differences persist. Men seem unable to live with any satisfaction if they cannot quarrel.

A Swamiji of the Smartha school told his audience the story that the gods asked Shiva and Rama themselves for the meaning of the word *Rameshwara* and Rama replied that it meant Rama's master, and Shiva said that it meant "He who is Shiva's master." The answer left the gods still in doubt and they applied to Brahma for clarification. He said it meant Rama is Ishwara, and Ishwara is Rama.

A good story, but it leaves two principles facing each other. The proper course is to go to the old and original idea of the identity of the two asserted in "*Rudro Narayanascaiva*."

This was stated in a fuller form in a Sanskrit play of later centuries which was slightly modified at the end, and carved in a stone inscription in the Chennakeshava temple at Belur in Karnataka:

> He whom the Shaivas worship by the name of Shiva, the Vedantins (by the name) of Brahma, the Bouddhas of Buddha, the Jainas of Arhant, and others by other names, He is the same Hari, the Lord of the three worlds.

The *Shiva-mahimna Stotra* said much the same. Men call the Highest by several names according to their taste, but the aim of all of them is the same principle—as the aim of all rivers is the sea.

Religion has not only appropriated great literature, but created literature to propagate its ideas. The *Bhagavata*, the *Adhyatma Ramayana*, and all the Puranas are literature written with the object of spreading faith and belief. Much of it was well-meant; but such of it as spoke in praise of any one idea of God was clearly misconceived.

A good proportion of this literature went wrong because it made God into a human being, with a form like man's, and gave him all the weaknesses of this human person. God had to have a wife, a home, servants; and shape and position.

This limits the limitless, and stunts ideas. Vishnu cannot be present in Kailasa except as an attendant, nor Shiva in Vaikuntha except as a devotee! Lakshmi can be the wife of Vishnu only, and Gauri of Shiva only. The "gods" are one and the wives, each representing the Mother of the Universe, must be one; but their places are fixed in our ideas and they cannot be interchanged. Why, Rukmini is the wife of Krishna and Sita, of Ra a. Rama must not be described as Rukmini's husband, nor Krishna as Sita's. Rama and Krishna are the same Vishnu; both Rukmini and Sita are Lakshmi; but there can be no mixing up of the names.

Devotional poetry makes for even greater absurdities. The different gods have different physical bodies as seen in the Shiva and Mohini stories; so have their wives; and the husband and wife relationship of the god and his spouse is described in simple physical terms. All written in perfect good faith, with no sense of impropriety. All misconceived, and utterly unnecessary.

Equally unsound are some of the stories about other aspects of godhead.

Ganapati, known to the West as the Elephant God, is in origin without doubt the form of the *Pranava: Om.* The symbol looks like a head with a trunk placed on a huge belly. The *Pranava* represents the alphabet: the alphabet is the basis of all writing and so of knowledge. So a person with a strong imagination made the *Pranava* symbol into a being with an elephant's trunk and a huge belly and made him the god of all knowledge.

Time passed. Someone made up a story about how the god came to have the elephant head. Parvati went into the bathing room to have a bath. She scraped off the dirt on her body and made it into the figure of a boy and left him at the door to stop anyone going in. Shiva returned from somewhere and tried to go in. The boy stopped him. Shiva slew him. Parvati came out and saw what had happened, and was stricken with grief. Shiva consoled her and went out (or sent out his attendants), obtained the head of an elephant, and fixed it on the body of the boy. So Ganapati came to have an elephant's head.

The story is fantastic. It makes Parvati's body so filthy that the dirt scraped from it was enough to form the figure of a boy. What a notion of the source of all purity, the Mother of the Universe! It makes Shiva into a thoughtless and irascible brave, and gives no help in understanding how the incongruous figure created as described by it became the deity of all knowledge. No servants in the house, no bolt to the bathroom!

This is not all. Other men of imagination later added story to story, and detail to detail. Shri S. K. Ramachandra Rao wrote some time ago a pamphlet on Ganapati and gave at the end of it pictures of Ganapati in all sorts of weird and bizarre poses and postures. Some of the pictures look like illustrations of the worst pornography, whether of the past in India or of the present day outside.

The mistake in all this is in conceiving the Deity, which is all Spirit, and is endless, as something physical and limited.

Other errors result when a metaphor is carried too far. One of the stories is that Brahma fell in love with Saraswati, whom he had created, and tried to embrace her, and she ran, and Shiva came along and cut off his head and used the skull for his begging bowl! The story no doubt starts from the idea that a writer likes his own work and enjoys it. But the power of creation and the thing created become father and daughter, and the trouble follows.

All this has reference to Hinduism. There are aberrations like this in other religions too. I do not know enough about them and do not speak of them. Their leaders and followers should think of them as I have done about Hinduism and see how any aberrations should be corrected.

What Next?

The leaders of the large masses of men professing all the great religions have now to gather together in one assembly and agree to pool together the wisdom found in each and accept the total as the One Religion which mankind needs. They have to realize, that is, that the idea of a number of religions is wrong and that the race has been groping towards the One Religion that it needs for happiness here and salvation hereafter.

They have to teach all the population of the world from now on to feel that it is all one household, that each should do his best in the service of the whole, produce all he can, and take what he absolutely needs, and leave the rest to be used by his fellow men.

This is to start bringing in the Earthly Paradise. The history of the race will have borne its best fruit when its leaders in some near generation all over the world give up all smallness of heart and shortness of vision and accept responsibility for the welfare of the whole of mankind.

MASTI VENKATESA IYENGAR

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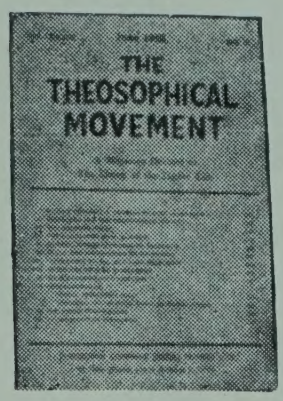

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